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ABSTRACT

Twenty-seven mildly and moderately mentally handicapped special education graduates from a special school and 23 mildly and moderately mentally handicapped special education graduates from a mainstream school were interviewed to determine long range benefits of each program. Interviews 1 and 2 years after graduation were designed to measure differences in employment skill levels, unemployment rates, job satisfaction, arrests and convictions, welfare assistance, financial independence, income level, and other variables. Data suggested that there was little difference in long range characteristics for either group, although the small sample size precluded drawing firm conclusions on either side of the question. (Author/CL)

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A COMPARISON OF THE LONG RANGE BENEFITS OF GRADUATION FROM SPECIAL VS. MAINSTREAM SCHOOL FOR MILDLY MENTALLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

REPORT NO. 75-16

JUNE, 1975

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ABSTRACT

Special Education graduates from a mainstream school (Lincoln) and from the special school (Pacific) were interviewed to determine whether graduates from either school exhibited greater long range benefits from their education program.

Interviews were designed to measure differences in employment skill levels, unemployment rates, job satisfaction, arrests and convictions, welfare assistance, financial independence, income level, and other variables.

Findings from this pilot study, though tentative, showed a slight but consistent trend toward more positive ratings for the Lincoln graduates.

Recommendations for the design of a proposed longitudinal study are included.

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INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Special Education staff have invested a great deal of time and energy in programs based on the assumption that handicapped students will gain long range benefits by being located in regular school buildings rather than in separate facilities. The Pacific School is a separate facility housing Special Education programs for mentally and/or physically handicapped students who live within the Seattle School District.

Over the past two years there has been a substantial increase in the mildly and moderately mentally handicapped student population in "regular" school buildings, and a proportionate decrease in the population at Pacific. It seems important, therefore, to begin to gather some information on the post-high school circumstances of handicapped graduates in order to see if, in fact, there is any difference between those handicapped students who were graduated from a program located in a regular school and those from a program located in a separate facility.

Purpose of the Study. The question addressed by this study was: Do mildly and moderately mentally handicapped students graduating from a main stream Special Education program exhibit greater long range benefits from their education program than do comparable students graduating from a separate self-contained program?

METHODOLOGY

To answer the question of comparative long range benefits of mainstream vs. self-contained programs, Special Education graduates of one of the twelve regular Seattle High Schools (Lincoln) and a similar group of graduates of the Pacific School were interviewed, using the instrument described below. Four teaching members of the Special Education staff conducted the interviews during April, 1975. The interviewers met on one occasion with the writer after the interview format had been completed and before the interviews were begun. Agreements were made at that time for the purpose of achieving uniformity in conducting the interviews, and in drawing the sample.

Population and Sample. The population to which results of the study were to be generalized was the broad category of all mildly mentally handicapped students for whom an assignment to the special school or to a regular school would be feasible. The sample for this study consisted of 23 Pacific graduates who had been considered eligible for enrollment at regular high schools, and 27 Special Education alumni of Lincoln.

The extent of handicap experienced by some students at Pacific is severe enough to preclude enrollment in a regular school; students in this category were not included in the sample. Students were selected (from the 1973 and 1974 graduates of both Lincoln and Pacific schools) if, in the opinion of the Special Education staff, the students' abilities were such that they might equally well have been assigned to the other school. Thus, there was assurance that the two groups were similar.

Instrument. An interview format was developed which measured whether graduates from one school or the other exhibited more desirable outcomes in the following variables:

1) skill levels required in their employment

2) unemployment rates

3) job satisfaction

4) arrests and convictions

5) welfare assistance

6) difficulty in obtaining service from State Department of Social and Health Services

7) financial independence

8) income levels

9) problems with creditors

10) satisfaction with financial situation

11) rates of employment outside of sheltered workshop situations

12) adequacy of preparation for employment.

A copy of the interview format appears in the Appendix, p. 11.

Limitations of the Study

The sample sizes (mainstream n = 27, special n = 23) were not large. Moreover, the ordinary assumptions about normality of underlying population parameters were not applicable. Consequently, statistical tests to discover significant differences between groups were not employed. Therefore, conclusions drawn for the students attending either school could at best be tentative.

A further difficulty was the reliability of subject responses to sensitive questions relating to employment status, arrest records, and the like. Responses to questions posed in the study were accepted at face value. Some of the interviewers felt they had received inaccurate responses about personal income.

Handicapped students are placed in a mainstream school or the special school after careful consideration is given to the needs of the students and of each school's ability to satisfy those needs. In practice, this means that a student whose handicap requires it will be placed in the (special) Pacific School. The total student populations in the Special Education programs at the mainstream and regular schools are therefore not comparable, and this consideration was the basis for adopting the sampling strategy described above.

ANALYSIS

Characteristics of the Sample

The chief characteristics of the sample of 23 Pacific graduates and 27 Lincoln graduates are presented in Table I below.

TABLE I

CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLES OF LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL AND PACIFIC SCHOOL GRADUATES

	Numbers Responding	
	Lincoln	Pacific
Sex		
Male	19	15
Female	8	8
Age		
18	0	6
19	6	8
20	9	7
21	8	0
22	1	0
Did Not Respond	3	2
Ethnic Heritage		
Black	1	7
Asian	1	1
White	24	13
Other	1	0
Did Not Respond	1	1
Marital Status		
Single	22	22
Married	4	1
Did Not Respond	0	1
Number of Children		
0	24	21
1	1	1
2	1	0
3	1	0
Did Not Respond	1	0
Year Graduated		
1973	9	11
1974	17	10
Unspecified	1	2

Summary of the Data

Questions and responses given in the interviews are tabulated here.

Q. "Do you happen to be working right now?

	Lincoln		Pacific	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	17	63	14	61
No	10	37	9	39

Q. "How many different jobs have you had since you finished school?"

		Number of Jobs Held Since Graduation					
		0	1	2	3	4	5
Number of Persons Responding	Lincoln	4	10	3	8	1	1
	Pacific	5	16	1	1	-	-

Q. "Have you had any work training since you finished high school?"

	Lincoln		Pacific	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	8	31	6	27
No	18	69	16	73

Q. (If working) "What kind of work do you do?"

Responses from both groups included: janitor, assembler, sales clerk, dishwasher, construction worker, bagger, nursing aide, cement box maker, carnival ride operator, assembly line solderer, tutor, plumbing, clerk, McDonald's (food chain) employee, orderly, telephone parts washer, moulder, painter's helper, machine operator, warehouseman, grill runner, and rug layer.

Q. (If working) "Where are you employed?"

Graduates from both groups mentioned the Northwest Center, Meets-a-Need, Goodwill, Learning Day Care, Temple Day Care, University Hospital, South Campus (S.S.C.), Washington Technical Institute, Reading Clinic, Odessa Clinic, Randy Carter Center, Seattle Handicapped Center, and Orion Industries.

Q. (If working) "How did you happen to find your present job?"

Vocational Counselor	22
Friend or own initiative	6
Employment agency	0
Washington State Employment Security	0

Q. (If not working) "Are you on welfare right now?"

	Lincoln		Pacific	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	6	27	3	16
No	16	73	16	84

None of the graduates reported having problems in getting welfare services.

Q. "May I ask you what your monthly income is, on the average?"

Reported Income	Lincoln n	Pacific n
$ 0 - $100	4	6
101 - 200	6	2
201 - 300	5	2
301 - 400	3	1
401 - 500	2	1
501 - 600	2	1
600 +	1	2

Three graduates reported some difficulty in meeting expenses.

Q. "Are you able to pay any of your own living expenses?"

Portion of Own Living Expenses	Lincoln	Pacific
None	8	5
Some	6	7
All	14	9

Q. "Right now, who is living with you?"

Living With	Lincoln	Pacific
Parents	15	17
Friend	2	1
Spouse	3	1
Sister	1	0
Group Home	1	1
Child	0	1
Alone	3	1

Six respondents reported having any dependents, five of the six having graduated from the Lincoln school. Only one respondent reported ever having been arrested.

Interviewer Impressions

After the survey was completed, the Special Education teachers conducting the interviews felt a need to record their estimates of overall social adjustment, and overall community mobility. Additionally they felt that item 29 of the interview schedule, interviewer impressions of work category relating to job skills, should be supplemented with an additional impression of job potential. The distinction was made in order to appraise skills of those students who were actually employed, and to appraise the potential of all, even though some might not be employed.

A summary of these interviewer impressions is presented in Table II. Although the impressions were highly subjective, there was a slight but consistent trend toward more positive ratings for the Lincoln graduates.

TABLE II

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWER IMPRESSIONS OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND COMMUNITY MOBILITY TRAITS OF LINCOLN AND PACIFIC GRADUATES

Interviewer Impression of Respondents	Lincoln n	Pacific n
Job Satisfaction		
High	12	4
Medium	4	7
Low	8	4
Work Category		
Unskilled	15	17
Semi-skilled	9	4
Skilled	3	0
Job Potential		
Unskilled	11	6
Semi-skilled	12	6
Skilled	4	1
Social Adjustment		
High	2	1
Medium	16	9
Low	9	11
Community Mobility*		
High	18	3
Medium	7	10
Low	2	8

*Community Mobility referred to the student's ability to travel independently about the city.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

There was nothing found in the data to support the hypothesis that there is a difference in the early years following graduation from special schools or mainstream schools for handicapped students. The data suggest that there is little difference in employment and other long range characteristics for comparable graduates of special or mainstream schools. As noted earlier, however, the small sample size precluded drawing firm conclusions on either side of the question.

The basic question asked was significant and warrants further study. Of course, the question has significance only to students for whom "there is a choice," i.e., those students for whom it is feasible to place in either a regular or a mainstream school.

Important directions for future study are suggested by the experience of the staff in conducting the present pilot study. If such a longitudinal study is to be conducted, the following suggestions should be taken into consideration:

- Statistical comparisons should be made based on a comparatively large number of subjects.
- Accumulate data over a period of five or ten years in order to increase n.
- Involve Special Education staff in discussions to create the design.
- Develop a better understanding among interviewers of the design requirements of the proposed study.
- Generate operational definitions of such terms as "skilled," "unskilled," or "high," "medium," and "low," when applied to such concepts as job satisfaction.
- Develop objective criteria for use in selecting the participants of the study.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Pacific/Lincoln Post-Graduate Follow-Up

Before we begin the survey, let me tell you that the purpose of asking these questions is to find out from the graduates themselves just what the Seattle School District might do to improve its programs for many students. Other students will be better off, hopefully, because people like yourself have been willing to help in our survey. Still, if there are some questions you'd rather not answer, just tell me, and we'll leave them out. We learn how former students feel by counting the number of people who respond to questions. What you think is important to us, and we use the results by counting how people answer. Your name will not be used in the results, only the numbers from the counted answers. Do you have any questions before we start?

O.K ? Then let's begin.

1. Do you happen to be working right now? 1. Y N

2. What year did you complete high school? 2. 19__

3. How many different jobs have you had since you finished high school? 3. _____

4. Have you had any work training since you finished high school? 4. Y N

5. Where was it? (Seattle schools, employment office, unemployment grants, etc.)

_____

If graduate is presently employed, ask items 6 - 10.

6. What kind of work do you do? _____

7. How do you like the people you work with? _____

_____

8. What do you like most about your job? _____

_____

9. What do you like least about your job? _____

_____

10. How did you happen to find your present job? 10. _____

1 Employment agency
2 Vocational counselor
3 Friend/relative
4 Self-initiative
5 Employment Security
6 Other (please specify) _____

If graduate is presently unemployed, ask items 12 - 13.

11. Are you on welfare right now? 11. Y N

12. Do you have any problems in getting welfare services? 12. Y N

Please ask remaining questions of all graduates.

13. May I ask you what your monthly income is, on the average? 13. _____

14. Have you experienced any problems with paying your bills on time? 14. Y N

15. Right now, who is living with you? (Expected response is a relationship, not an individual name)

_____

16. Are you able to pay any of your own living expenses? 16. _____

1 None
2 Some
3 All

17. Do you have any dependents? How many? 17. _____

18. Not counting traffic tickets, have you had any problems with the police? 18. Y N

If "yes":

19. Have you been arrested? 19. Y N

20. Why were you arrested? _____

_____

21. How did it turn out in court? _____

After completing the interview, indicate that's all the questions you have to ask, invite respondent to ask or add anything more, and thank the respondent, giving assurances of the value to the school in helping other students in the future.

Interviewer: Please record your observations on the following items with respect to the respondent. Starred (*) items may be found in office records.

22. Sex: _____ M _____ F

23. *Age: _____

24. *Ethnic Code:
_____ Black
_____ Chicano
_____ Native American
_____ Asian American
_____ White
_____ Other

25. Marital Status:
_____ Single
_____ Married
_____ Other

26. Number of children: _____

27. *Graduated from:
_____ Lincoln
_____ Pacific

28. Interviewer impression of respondent's job satisfaction:
_____ High
_____ Medium
_____ Low

29. Interviewer impression of work category:
_____ Unskilled
_____ Semi-skilled
_____ Skilled

30. ID _____